

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-13 JUSE-00
NSAE-00 CTME-00 SNM-05 TRSE-00 ICA-11 NSC-05
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DEA HQTS FOR A AND ENOA

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SNAR, CO
SUBJECT: VISIT TO COLOMBIA BY DEA ADMINISTRATOR BENSINGER

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. VISIT OF DEA ADMINISTRATOR BENSINGER, ACCOMPANIED BY US CUSTOMS ASS'T. COMMISSIONER VERNON HANN, RESULTED IN VERY USEFUL EXCHANGE WITH GOC OFFICIALS ON PROBLEMS, PROGRESS AND FUTURE PLANS FOR THE COOPERATIVE ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM IN COLOMBIA. TRAVEL WITH GOC AUTHORITIES TO THE GUAJIRA AND TO LETICIA PROVIDED BASIS FOR FACTUAL DISCUSSION OF EXISTING SITUATION. BENSINGER'S OBSERVATION IN RADIO INTERVIEW THAT COLOMBIAN MILITARY PRESENCE WAS NEEDED TO SOLVE PROBLEMS IN GUAJIRA RECEIVED MAJOR PRESS ATTENTION. COLOMBIAN REACTION TO STATEMENT WAS GENERALLY POSITIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN DEPTH DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL SERRANO AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CUSTOMS FRANCO AS THE HEADS OF THE TWO GOC ENTITIES WITH PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE NARCOTICS FIELD. BOTH SERRANO AND FRANCO ALSO ACCOMPANIED BENSINGER ON TRIP TO THE GUAJIRA. DISCUSSIONS CONTRIBUTED SUBSTANTIALLY
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TO CLARIFYING AND FURTHERING BOTH COUNTRIES' PLANS FOR INCREASED ACTIVITY AND COOPERATION.

3. BENSINGER ALSO MET WITH DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NATIONAL POLICE VALDERRAMA AND LATTER'S TOP AIDES, WHO OUTLINED NATIONAL POLICE EFFORTS IN NAROCOTICS FIELD AND EXPRESSED THEIR DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN A ROLE. BENSINGER EXPLAIND US POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR THE

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S UNIT ON BASIS OF ASSIGNMENT WITHIN GOC OF
PRIMARY NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT ROLE TO THAT ENTITY.

4. THROUGH A FORTUITOUS ENCOUNTER AT THE AIRPORT, BENSINGER MET
MINISTER OF DEFENSE VARON AND ARMED FORCES COMMANDER CAMACHO.
BENSINGER HAD OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW FINDINGS OF GUAJIRA TRIP WITH
CAMACHO WHO EXPRESSED INTEREST, BUT HELD RESERVATIONS REGARDING
THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN THAT REGION.

5. THE ONE-DAY TRIP TO THE GUAJIRA BY PLANE AND HELICOPETER WAS
HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL, PROVIDING BOTH GOC AND USG OFFICIALS WITH FIRST-
HAND, FACTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM. THEY WERE
IMPRESSED WITH THE WIDE-SCALE, OVERT CULTIVATION OF MARIHUANA
AND WITH THE NUMBER AND SIZE OF THE CLANDESTINE AIR STRIPS. DIS-
CUSSION OF METHODS TO SUPPRESS THIS MASSIVE ACTIVITY WITH ITS
IMPLICATIONS BOTH FOR NARCOTICS CONTROL AND THE SECURITY OF COL-
OMBIA LED TO CONCLUSION THAT AN ACTIVE GOC MILITARY
PRESENCE OFFERED THE ONLY POSSIBLITY OF EFFECTIVE INTERDICTION.

6. BENSINGER, AGAIN ACCOMPANIED BY GOC OFFICIALS, ALSO MADE A
ONE-DAY TRIP TO LETICIA, COLOMBIA'S PORT ON THE AMAZON RIVER.
THERE THE GROUP HEARD REPORTS THAT LETICIA IS A MAJOR TRANSIT
POINT FOR COCAINE PASTE, SAW THE LACK OF EFFECTIVE GOC CUSTOMS
CONTROL AND THE DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN THE REGION IN EFFECTING
SUCH CONTROL.

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7. TODELAR, A LOCAL RADIO NETWORK, REQUESTED AN INTERVIEW WITH
BENSINGER, WHICH WAS CONDUCTED BY TELEPHONE (TEXT BEING REPORTED
SEPTEL), AND WAS SUBSEQUENTLY CONVERED IN THE PRESS. CONVERAGE
CONCENTRATED ON BENSINGER'S COMMENTSON THE NEED FOR A MILITARY
ROLE IN SOLVING THE PROBLEMS IN THE GUAJIRA. THROUGH AN APPAR-
ENTLY INADVERTENT PRESS DISTORTION, THE HEADLINES ANNOUNCED THAT
BENSINGER WAS CALLING FOR "MILITARIZATION" OF THE GUAJIRA.
DESPITE THE POLIMICAL EFFECT OF THIS DISTORITON, PRESS REACTION
AND PUBLIC COMMENT BY OFFICIALS WERE GENERALLY FAVORABLE, FINDING
VARYING DEGREES OF MERIT IN BENSINGER'S ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION
AND HIS RECOMMENDATIONS. (FOR DETAILS ON REACTION SEE BOGOTA
7200 & 7201). MINISTER OF DEFENSE VARON AND ARMED FORCES
COMMANDER CAMACHO WERE REPORTED BY THE PRESS ON AUGUST 2 AS NOTING
THE BENSINGER STATEMENT WAS UNOFFICIAL AND ATTACHING LESSER IMPORT-
ANCE TO IT. VARON REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT THE PROBLEMS IN THE
GUAJIRA WERE TOO COMPLEX FOR A SOLELY MILITARY SOLUTION.
BRIGGS

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Draft Date: 02 aug 1978
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